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STATEMENT OF

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

ON THE VA MEDICAL AND PROSTHETIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

April 27, 2006

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Senator Craig, Members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and Colleagues from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

It is with great pride that I come before you as a veteran, as Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research at a VA Medical Center (VAMC), a current member of the VA Career Development Review Board, and as a basic science research investigator who has enjoyed 26 years of continuous funding through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Merit Review Research Program.

Clinical investigators have successfully conducted basic science research for more than 25 years at the VAMC in the areas of cardiology, oncology, pharmacology, immunology and infectious diseases. Patient related research has been conducted through outcomes research projects involving clinical pharmacology, pulmonary medicine and the modern mechanisms of clinical teaching. Investigators have also participated or served as Principal Investigators in clinical trials involving treatment of hepatitis C, HIV, pneumonia, bronchitis, skin and soft tissue infections, septic shock, exacerbations of asthma and urinary tract infections. These clinical studies have been in FDA phase II and III clinical studies using novel new antibiotics and anti-viral agents. All have been on the cutting edge of new clinical treatments. Boise VAMC is currently participating in a clinical trial to compare treatments for clinically localized prostate cancer. Prostate cancer therapy is a topic of considerable discussion in the medical community, and this study could provide significant value to that discussion.

At all VAMCs, the importance of research cannot be separated from quality medical care for veterans. The VA's model of patient care, teaching and research attracts the best, brightest and most hard working of physicians. While translational research defined as "from the bench to the bedside" has been newly discovered by other healthcare systems, this is exactly what the VA

Merit Review Program at Boise VAMC and elsewhere has been doing for over 25 years. Historically, within the VA system, we have learned to make clinical observations, ask research questions, design experiments to answer these questions and then move our results to clinical trials to improve the care of veterans. As a consequence of the VA model for research, there is currently a remarkable cadre of "clinical investigators" who enjoy national and international acclaim. The title of this hearing, "VA Research: Investing Today to Guide Tomorrow's Treatment" is in keeping with the historical theme of the VA Office of Research and Development.

For example, a Boise researcher is currently studying how the heart reacts when anthracyclines are used to treat cancer or infections. Another researcher is working on what may be causing the increasing number of streptococcal infections.

At small VA research operations, we must continuously identify opportunities to improve our program, while balancing the responsibilities and work loads of investigators and administrative staff. As we develop plans to improve our program, it is also crucial that we continue to identify funding sources to support our facility infrastructure needs. Our goal is to improve patient care by finding solutions through research projects that meet the needs of veterans in Idaho as well as the Nation as a whole. Your support and interest in our needs is appreciated.